

Overtures from Bethany CRC, Fenwick Council to Classis Niagara.

Approved in the meeting of the Council Sept. 13, 2021

Chair: Tim Van Hoffen. Clerk: Richard Van Lochem

The following 3 overtures are in reference to the report from the "Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality" henceforth referred to as "The Report".

Preamble: There is clearly today a persistent need for the church to speak the truth of Scripture in love in the midst of our culture's growing sexual confusion and chaos. An integral part of this calling is to listen carefully and lovingly to the experiences, often painful, of persons living with same-sex attraction and especially in the context of church life.

We lament our pastoral failures to have often let silence be the message to those living with sexual challenges and temptations. We lament the harsh and judgmental treatment of many with respect to sexual challenges which has too often been the default reaction of fellow believers to their neighbors and their brothers and sisters in Christ who share what they struggle with.

We recognise there are Christians, including Christian scholars, who espouse acceptance of same-sex marriage as the way to answer the suffering and the needs of those living with same-sex attraction. These perspectives most often start from a position of acceptance of same sex attraction as being in some way normative and from there going to Scripture to see how this can work Biblically. We do not believe that is a faithful starting point.

We need to move from Scripture to how we are all called to live, submitting our lives in all aspects to the Living Word. We believe the Holy Spirit does not lead us to live in ways that are contrary to the Scriptures. We also recognize our understanding of the Scriptures is always a work in progress. Yet changing our views of any teaching of the Scriptures has to be supported by the Scriptures themselves, and not be primarily the result of personal experiences regardless of how intense and persistent, nor be in reaction to the threat of ridicule and rejection of Scriptural teaching by those who disagree.

Striving to speak the truth in love we present the following overtures in this ongoing journey of ministry together.

Overture 1:

Bethany CRC Council overtures Classis Niagara to overture Synod to affirm the biblical foundation sections of The Report as being in accord with biblical teaching understood from a Reformed perspective as it pertains to human sexuality in the areas addressed in the report.

Grounds:

1. The Report's examination of Biblical passages pertaining to human sexuality is consistently rooted in sound Reformed Biblical hermeneutics. The various sections dealing with specific bible passages present exegetical answers to the different biblical perspectives that are being espoused today.
2. The Report's approach starts with Scripture as the foundation for our theology and ethical approaches, rather than starting from peoples' experiences or from our culture's beliefs about human sexuality. As we engage, discuss, learn and grow in loving ministry with respect to the areas discussed in The Report, we need to be anchored in the truth of God's Word.

3. These sections of The Report cover the relevant passages of Scripture in a holistic way, freely allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture.
4. Accepting these sections does not mean accepting exactly The Report's wording as the best ways to put things. Yet the teaching of these sections remain in basic agreement with Biblical teaching.

Overture 2:

Bethany CRC Council overtures Classis Niagara to overture Synod to recommend The Report as a whole to the churches as a useful tool to help encourage ongoing learning, discussion, and guidance towards biblically faithful responses to such pastoral situations churches face.

Grounds:

1. There is much that can be learned from The Report. It needs more study at the local church level, especially where many churches have not discussed these topics. The Report can be used to facilitate more openness in this regard.
2. Pastoral responses in ministry are always locally contextualized. The Report gives guidance as to what those responses could look like without mandating specific actions in every situation.
3. Some areas The Report covers are relatively new areas even in our culture (e.g. some gender questions). More needs to be learned and shared about what these things mean. The Report offers a good introduction to these areas as well as listing many resources for ongoing learning.

Overture 3:

Bethany CRC overtures Classis to overture Synod to amend Church Order 2020, Article 69-C by adding the sentence, "Same sex marriage is one example of a marriage considered to be in conflict with the Word of God."

Grounds:

1. The Report has adequately shown that same sex marriage is not in keeping with the teaching of the Word of God, including responding to revisionist perspectives.
2. The present wording of CO, Art 69 does not make this clear in today's context of other perspectives on Scripture and how they interpret Scripture. Also Supplement, Article 69-c still does not actually say this but refers back to a previous Synod decision. Adding this line would clarify this in a simple straightforward fashion.
3. This will make the CO instructions clear for CRC ministers being asked to officiate at same sex weddings. It is then not some personal choice of a minister for or against some couple, but part of the denomination's instructions and requirements of them.
4. Leaving this unclear and up to a local pastor's option, strains our covenantal relationship as a denomination as represented in our Church Order concerning a very public ministry, namely, that of performing marriages, and could even lead a pastor into act in conflict with his/her own Council.